32: Brown--89-90 (1913) 1914 Woleaians-1-3
116, 212, 174 Woleai

"In July, 1913, I paid a visit to the small reef island, Oleai, or Uleai, or Wolea, of one of the most westerly of the Caroline group. One of the chiefs squatted, at the suggestion of Herr Runge, the only European on the islet, and wrote a sentence in the script of the island. A few week [sic] ago I received from Mr. Runge a full list of the characters written by the chief, Egilimar. There are fifty-one, and evidently each represents a syllable, as will be seen by the accompanying copy of the list. Alongside he has also written Runge, Brun, and Egilimar in the script; and it will be seen that two, if not three, of those employed to write the last name are not given in the list. It is manifestly a syllabary, as is the Katukana of Japan, and a script that was invented in Korea some centuries ago, but never drove out the Chinese ideographs. But none of the characters have any resemblance to these. Nor do they resemble in any respect any of the alphabets we know, European, Levantine, Arabic, or Devanagari. The only other script known in the groups or islands of the Pacific is that of the Easter Island tablets. But they are ideographic; many of them according to the interpretation of them supplied to Bishop Jaussen, of Tahiti, by one of the learned men of the Easter Islands, bear resemblance to the form of the thing they represent, though it is affirmed also that they were but mnemonic suggestions of the beginning of a word or line of the hymns or lyrics sung at the annual festivals. They are but one stage beyond the ideographic hieroglyphs on the one hand, and serve the same purpose as the knots in the quipus of ancient Peru and of

the Pelew Islands.

This Oleai syllabic script is one stage further on in development towards an alphabet. Most of the characters are highly conventionalised, but some retain a resemblance to the thing to which their name or sound corresponds. In the [90] second column, the seventh from the bottom, schrũ means in the language of the islet 'a fishbone,' and the character has manifestly originated in a representation of a fish; the fifth from the bottom, lõ, means 'a bottle,' and evidently the character retains something of the form of the coconut water-vessel. In the first column, the sixth, fifth, fourth, third, and second from the bottom have a hint of what their syllable indicates; ngã meaning 'bamboo,' boa 'ulcer,' warr 'canoe,' raa 'mast,' uh 'sail.' So in the third column, the first, rã, means 'a saw'; the second, lũh, 'a young coconut'; the third, sthah, 'a knife.' In a few others there might be found by stretching the imagination a hint of the thing indicated by the syllable. But the majority of the characters can be connected by no possibility with the meaning of the sound indicated.

The script is now known only to five men on the islet; but it is probably a relic of a wide usage in the archipelago. *There is no possibility of* any one of the five having invented it, and if invented by them since Europeans arrived it would have taken the forms either of the European alphabet or of the things bought or sold, of whose names and

numbers they wished to keep a record. If anyone wishes to compare this with such a script invented for commercial purposes, he should look up Furness's The Island of Stone Money; on page 138 is given a copy of an account kept by a native of Yap for trade purposes; and this native Fatamak, a sorcerer, I can personally testify, is a man of keen intelligence. A comparison will bring out the gulf that separates the two scripts. This Oleai script is manifestly the product of long ages for the use of the organisers of a highly-organised community of considerable size. In other words, it must have belonged to the ruling class of an empire of some extent, that needed constant record of the facts of intercourse and organisation."